



# Department of Justice

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## **MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA AUSAS RECOGNIZED AT ANNUAL U.S. ATTORNEY AWARDS CEREMONY**

TAMPA - The Department of Justice held its 27th annual Executive Office for United States Attorneys (EOUSA) Director's Awards Ceremony today, during which 159 award recipients from more than 45 districts were recognized for their dedication to carrying out the mission of the Department of Justice. Recipients included Assistant United States Attorneys, law enforcement agents, litigation teams and others who have made outstanding contributions in federal, state and local law enforcement. Among the award recipients were Assistant United States Attorneys David P. Rhodes and Peggy Morris Ronca of the Middle District of Florida.

"These award recipients have been honored for their service and dedication to our country, as well as to their local communities," said Attorney General Eric Holder. "Each of these committed public servants has helped to advance the Justice Department's critical work. Their contributions have had a powerful impact in ensuring the strength of our justice system, the security of our communities, and the promise of our democracy."

David Rhodes, Chief of the Appellate Division, and Peggy Morris Ronca, of the Appellate Division in Orlando, were recognized for their extraordinary appellate work in *United States v. Irej*, Appeal No. 08-10997, in the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. Their work resulted in an *en banc* opinion vacating the 17 1/2-year sentence the district court had imposed on a notorious child abuser and pornographer and ordering the district court to impose the statutory maximum sentence of 30 years' imprisonment. Facing an imposing, abuse-of-discretion standard of review, and a decision by a panel of the court affirming Irej's sentence, AUSA Rhodes—with AUSA Ronca's assistance—wrote exceptionally compelling briefs and argued the case before the entire 13-judge court, explaining the critical role of the appellate courts in reviewing the reasonableness of sentences imposed by the district courts. They convinced the en banc court that the only reasonable sentence was the statutory maximum term, and obtained a published, en banc opinion of unprecedented result and exceptionally important scope.

“David Rhodes and Peggy Ronca are most deserving of this EOUSA Director’s Award,” said U.S. Attorney Robert E. O’Neill. “Because of their hard work on this appeal, a child abuser and child pornographer was sentenced to the maximum extent of the law.”

AUSAs Rhodes’ and Ronca’s extraordinary work has helped the Department of Justice to continue its mission to enforce all of our nation’s laws.

EOUSA provides oversight, general executive assistance, and direction to the 94 United States Attorneys’ offices around the country. For more information on EOUSA and its mission, visit <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao>.